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## **Abstract for “Cognitive Futures in the Humanities”**

**Title:** Exploring body boundary imagery and affect regulation in Hitler’s “Mein Kampf”

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**Name:** Laura A. Cariola

**Affiliation:**

Lancaster University  
Department of Linguistics and English Language  
County South  
Lancaster LA1 4YL  
Lancashire  
United Kingdom  
Email: [l.cariola@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:l.cariola@lancaster.ac.uk)

**Abstract:**

Reminiscent of the Freudian psychoanalytic assumption that “the ego is primarily and foremost a bodily ego” (Freud, 1923, p. 26), the corporeal turn of embodiment in cognitive linguistics situates the human body at the intersection of mind and language. The body becomes a source of unconscious semiotic processes that emerge in early infant socialization experiences concurrent with the development of a coherent self-image, body boundary schema and adaptive affect regulation (Violi, 2012). Psychodynamic theories propose that the development of a weak self-image and body boundary schema and maladaptive affect regulation stem from dysfunctional early socialization experiences.

The aims of this study were twofold. First, it employed computerised textual analysis to conduct a psychodynamic personality assessment to infer the unconscious psychodynamic processes of an individual’s written text. The Regressive Imagery Dictionary (RID) and the Body Type Dictionary (BTD) content analysis dictionaries were applied to Adolf Hitler’s (1943) book *Mein Kampf* to assess the frequency and strength of associations between body boundary imagery, primordial thought language, emotional language, self-references and other-oriented references. The statistical relations among the linguistic variables are assumed to provide insight into the unconscious dynamics that underpin Hitler’s language behaviour and psychodynamic processes, which are explained and interpreted using various developmental psychodynamic theories and drawing on textual examples. The second purpose of this study was to explore the use of body boundary imagery and its connection to the neurotic fear of penetration, with the hard shell of a body container serving as a double-image of rigid political categories that differentiate between the “self” and “other”.

The results largely confirmed the research hypotheses. Thus, Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* used significantly less barrier imagery and more penetration imagery than the G-

section of the LOB corpus, which indicates that Hitler possibly presents a Low Barrier personality with a reduced sense of body boundary differentiation. Such a pattern may be consistent with a borderline personality with a narcissistic organization (Kernberg, 1985; Langer, 1973). The notion of a borderline personality and vulnerable narcissism may also be reflected in an increased need to protect the fragile self from external threats (Mollon, 1986). Such a motive may be consistent with the positive association between self-references and barrier imagery, which may indicate an increased need to protect fragile body boundaries and enclose a vulnerable self-schema. Moreover, the mechanism of splitting has been most often described to explain Hitler anti-Semitic ideology that framed the German nation as inherently “good” and Jews as inherently “bad” (Waite, 1993). Even beyond this view, Hitler may have projected his own feelings of inadequacy onto others, for example, the Jews, driven by the narcissistic motive to maintain a positive and blame-free self-image, which may be reflected in the positive association between self-references and a positive affective lexis. By contrast, other-references are positively associated with an anxiety lexis, which may relate to Hitler’s projection of his own split-off anxieties onto others, such as the Jews, as well as indicate a fear of penetration that would threaten his fragile self-esteem and enhance the feelings of shame that underpin the narcissistic organization. The conclusion outlines the advantages and limitations of a quantitative linguistic approach to explore unconscious personality and psychodynamic processes that motivate an individual’s language behaviour.

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**Keywords:** Content analysis, political discourse, unconscious thought, body boundaries, affect regulation

**Biographical note:** Laura is an interdisciplinary researcher with training in linguistics and cognitive psychology. Currently, she is conducting her PhD in Linguistics at Lancaster University, Department of Linguistics and English Language, with a research focus upon the dynamicity of unconscious thought language, embodiment and affect regulation in discourses of pathological and non-pathological altered states of consciousness. Her research also focuses on political discourses as a reflection of group dynamics and the use of figurative language.